

Standard 5-1: The student will demonstrate an understanding of Reconstruction and its impact on racial relations in the United States.

5-1.3 Explain the effects of Reconstruction on African Americans, including their new rights and restrictions, their motivations to relocate to the North and the West, and the actions of the Freedmen's Bureau. (P, G, E, H)

Taxonomy Level: B 2 Understand/ Conceptual Knowledge

Previous/future knowledge:

In 3rd grade, students summarized the effects of Reconstruction in South Carolina, including the development of public education, racial advancements and tensions, and economic changes (3-4.3).

In 8th grade, students will summarize the events and the process that led to the ratification of South Carolina's constitution of 1868, including African American representation in the constitutional convention; the major provisions of the constitution; and the political and social changes that allowed African Americans, Northerners, "carpetbaggers," and "scalawags" to play a part in South Carolina state government (8-4.3). Students will also explain how events during Reconstruction improved opportunities for African Americans but created a backlash that, by the end of Reconstruction, negated the gains African Americans had made, including the philanthropy of northern aid societies, the assistance provided by the federal government such as the Freedman's Bureau, and their advancement in politics and education (8-4.4).

In United States history, students will summarize the progress made by African Americans during Reconstruction and the subsequent reversals brought by Reconstruction's end, including the creation of the Freedmen's Bureau, gains in educational and political opportunity, and the rise of anti-African American factions and legislation (USHC-4.5).

It is essential for students to know:

The initial reaction of freedmen to emancipation ranged from exhilaration to hesitancy to fear. Most celebrated the day of Jubilee. The aim of African Americans during Reconstruction was to reunite with their families and enjoy the freedom that had been denied to them for so long under slavery. Many left their plantations, but most soon returned to the land that they knew. It is a common misconception that most freedmen immediately migrated to the North and the West. African Americans did not migrate in large numbers from the South until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead, they married and established strong communities in the South. African Americans formed their own churches where they could worship freely. Many African Americans sought an education in the freedom schools they or others had established. Some established businesses. They voted and held elective office during Reconstruction.

African Americans also tried to acquire land, however, for the most part, this was denied to them. General Sherman had advocated distribution of 'forty acres and a mule' to African-American war refugees and some land was distributed during and shortly after the Civil War. The federal government returned most lands to white landowners that had been confiscated from Confederates and given to freedmen because the government respected the rights of whites to their landed property. Most freedmen had no money to purchase land and little opportunity to work for wages since there was little currency available in the South. Consequently, freedmen entered into agreements with the white landowners to trade their labor for land in an arrangement known as sharecropping. In exchange for the right to work the land that belonged to whites, African Americans and poor landless whites would be given a share of the crop that they grew. Although African Americans suffered from violence and intimidation, they carved out as much independence as possible in their own lives.

The Bureau for Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, called the **Freedman's Bureau**, was established by Congress *prior* to the end of the Civil War. Although the Bureau was never effectively staffed or funded, it was the first line of assistance to *all* people in the South in need, especially the destitute freedmen. The Freedman's Bureau provided food, clothing, medical care, education and some protection from the hostile white environment in the South. The Bureau helped many freedmen find jobs and provide some protection of their labor contracts. However, African Americans were not able to achieve economic independence because the great majority of African Americans did *not* receive their own land to farm. Instead the Freedman's Bureau helped African Americans to establish the sharecropping relationship with the worker-less plantation owner. The most important contribution of the Freedman's Bureau, however, was the facilitation of the establishment of over 1,000 schools throughout the South.

Although African Americans had constitutional rights as a result of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments often these were violated by terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan which included working class whites as well as judges, lawyers, businessmen and politicians.

It is not essential for students to know:

Students do not need to understand that the Freedman's Bureau was also charged with distributing to freedmen those lands that had been abandoned during the war or that had been confiscated as punishment for disloyalty to the Union. However, the Bureau was forced to take these lands back when President Johnson pardoned the white owners and returned their property to them. Congress would not pass legislation granting lands to freedmen because they respected the constitutional rights of southern whites to their landed property. The promise of "forty acres and a mule" was originally made by General Sherman in Field Order #15 as a way of dealing with the masses of refugees that followed his army.

Assessment guidelines:

Appropriate assessments require students to **explain** the effects of Reconstruction on African Americans and **interpret** the impact of Reconstruction on American democracy and the civil and political rights of African Americans. Students should be able to **explain** the role of the Freedman's Bureau